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May 26, 1961

MEMORANDUM

Subject: de Gaulle's Views on Conventional
Force and Berlin

1. It is resported that General de Gaulle fears that excessive emphasis on a NATO non-nuclear build-up would detract from the credibility of the nuclear deterrent in defending Berlin.

2. The President might answer de Gaulle's concerns on this point as follows:

a. A mere statement by the West that it will start nuclear war if access to Berlin is blocked may not carry sure conviction to the USSR. The Soviets will, however, be keenly aware of the danger that a substantial use of ground force in the heart of Europe might quickly escalate into nuclear war.

b. Thus, the threat of nuclear war is more credible if it appears that we will first create a substantial level of non-nuclear violence, over Berlin or any other issue, than if we merely threaten to initiate general nuclear war ab initio.

3. The President might draw an analogy to the 1930's, when de Gaulle argued for the "armee de metier" to permit rapid and effective French response to a wide range of possible German aggression--rather than relying entirely on a mass French conscript army, which could only be put into the field after general mobilization.

de Gaulle was proved right when the Germans occupied the Rhineland in 1936. This limited German aggression was not considered to warrant general mobilization, but it could have been frustrated through a smaller mobile force--whose use would have triggered general mobilization, if this had proved necessary.

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So today NATO must not be wholly reliant on its massive nuclear capability; it must have flexible and mobile non-nuclear capability as well. And we must make wholly clear that nuclear weapons will be used, if this force is not adequate to its task.

In this way, our non-nuclear build-up will enhance--rather than detract from--the credibility of the nuclear deterrent. For it will make credible our determination to create a high level of non-nuclear violence, which will be a trail of powder between the casus belli and the use of nuclear force.

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